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Gradual or Binary ? Folk theories vs. Formal Theories of Fictionality

The past fifty years or so have seen a number of narratives that combine facts and fiction (by this I mean invention, non-truth) in ways that challenge the conventions of culturally established genres. In this article I propose to compare two theories, one binary and the other partly binary and partly gradual, in order to examine what they have to say about these hybrids. The binary theory is based on the notion of world (Lewis 1978, Ryan 1991), and the partly gradual one is the rhetorical theory, proposed by Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh (2015).

Hybrids of fact and fiction

In Cold Blood, by Truman Capote (1965), subtitled "A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences," narrates a horrible murder in rural Kansas in 1959 using not only interviews and personal observations but also novelistic techniques such as dialogue and representations of the private thoughts of the characters, which are widely regarded as "signposts of fictionality" because they do not capture objectively knowable facts. Capote is even said to have invented a scene, at the end of the book, where the investigator of the case visits the graves of the murdered family and meets a young girl who was a friend of the dead daughter. The blurb on the back cover describes the work in terms appropriate for a novel: "mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy." The book was a stepping stone in the development of the genres of New Journalism, True Crime and creative nonfiction, and it is easy to understand why the formula has caught on: it combines the immersivity of fiction with informational value of factual narrative.

In *Dutch*, an authorized biography of Ronald Reagan (1999), the author Edmund Morris delegates the narration to a fictional character, a counterpart of himself born some thirty years earlier, whose life frequently crosses paths with the destiny of the future President. Not content to create a fictional point of view, Morris develops his authorial persona into a fully fleshed character, surrounds him with a circle of imaginary relatives and friends, and interweaves his life story with the main narrative. The fabrication is not directly acknowledged in the text, though critics have found subtle hints of the artifice, and the author further blurs the boundary between the fictional and the historical by documenting the lives of the made-up characters with fictional foot-notes. This device was widely criticized by the media, and unlike the narrative strategies of *In Cold Blood*, it has not been imitated, probably because it does not provide insights into the former President that could not be obtained by sticking to the conventions of the genre. Its immersive impact is also very limited. "Why should I waste my time reading about this imaginary guy when what I want to learn about is President Reagan," many readers will think.

Far less controversial, but still flirting with fictional techniques, is this passage from Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (1989). "One morning in August 1776, a rather shabbily dressed, stout gentleman stood at the dockside in Rotterdam. Puffing on a pipe, his tricorn hat planted carelessly over a perruque that had seen better days, he watched intently the slow progress of timber barges as they sailed down the canal in the direction of Dordrecht. This perfectly astonishing scene struck him as astonishing" (96). But this apparently fictional narrative mode is not typical of the book; most of it is written in standard historical style. Moreover, Schama admits that the scene is described in the diaries of the character,

Guillaume de Malesherbes. The scene is not invented, but rather, dramatized. Still, it betrays an influence of fiction on historical narrative that would have been inacceptable fifty years ago.

On the other hand, *My Struggle* by Karl Ove Knausgaard is categorized by the Library of Congress as a "biographical novel," but it avoids all strategies typical of fiction: it could easily pass as a regular autobiography. The narration focuses on the trivial and the everyday, there is no attempt at dramatic emplotment (even though some of the episodes are pretty dramatic), and the characters are named by their real-world names. They are therefore easily identifiable, and the narrator expresses guilt at turning relatives into literary characters. This practice put the author into serious trouble: the last installment of the series tells how Knausgaard's uncle tried to stop the publication because of the unflattering representation of the author's father, which, according to the uncle, sullied the family name.

Some novels consist of a collage of made up elements and genuine documents. *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders (2017) combines clearly identified quotations about Abraham Lincoln taken from historical works with a fantastical narrative about people buried in the same cemetery as Lincoln's young son who exist in a state of being neither dead nor alive. *The Many Lives and Sorrows of Josephine B*. by Sandra Gulland (1999) combines the fictional diary of the empress with excerpts from her real correspondence. In both cases, the two sources are clearly framed as distinct from each other.

And finally there is the relatively new genre of autofiction, whose name was coined by Serge Doubrovsky to describe his novel *Fils* (1977). According to Wikipedia, "In autofiction, an author may decide to recount their life in the third person, to modify significant details and characters, use invented subplots and imagined scenarios with real-life characters in the service of a search for self." The term autofiction covers a variety of practices, from memoirs resorting to novelistic techniques to heavily autobiographical novels like Knausgaard's *My Struggle* and to the creation of counterparts of the author who undergo totally imaginary events, such as a character named Michel Houellebecq who is murdered in Houellebcq's 2010 novel *La Carte et le territoire*.

Dealing with hybridity

These examples all defy the expectation that fiction should be invention [=false] and nonfiction should stick to reliable facts [=true]. Yet it could be argued that all fictions contain a great deal of referentiality, which means, a mixture of facts and invention, because the imagination does not work from scratch. The inclusion of facts in a fiction is a time-honored practice that is widely accepted and does not transgress any rule. Historical fiction such as *War and Peace* immediately comes to mind, but even a narrative as unrealistic as *Snow White* presupposes many facts: for instance, that apples are edible, that poison will kill people, that if you prick your finger with a needle you will bleed, and that blood is red. The relevance of our knowledge of facts, which means of our experience of reality for the understanding and interpretation of fiction is widely recognized by narratologists and philosophers; Stacie Friend calls it the "reality assumption," Kendall Walton proposes a formal definition that he calls the reality principle, I have called it, following David Lewis, the "principle of minimal departure," and Peter Rabinowitz proposes this succinct definition: "A basic rules of reading" is that "all fiction, even the most fantastic, is realistic, except when it signals to the contrary" (342). Therefore, the inclusion of facts in fiction is not problematic, except when it can be interpreted as defamation, as in the case of Knausgaard's uncle. What is problematic is the opposite

phenomenon: the inclusion of invention in genres culturally recognized as factual, such as history, biography, and autobiography. If there is a boundary between fact and fiction, this boundary can be crossed in one direction but not in the other.

How is the theory of fictionality going to deal with texts that transgress this rule ? The title of the 2024 SIRFF conference, "Degrees of Fictionality," suggests that a work can be more or less fictional. This diagnosis is supported by a metaphor that occurs over and over again in discussions of the kind of texts I have mentioned: they "blur the boundary" between fact and fiction. According to the blurred boundary metaphor, there are works that are clearly fiction, others that are clearly factual, and between them there is an uncertain zone, to which the examples mentioned above belong. Another way to view things is to postulate a continuum leading from strictly referential genres made exclusively of facts to imaginative genres made exclusively of invention. The degree of fictionality of a text is a matter of the proportion of truth and invention, and my examples stand in the middle—some closer to the fiction pole, others closer to the factual pole. The continuum model and the blurred boundary model correspond to what may be called "folk theories of fiction." Most people will tell you that *In Cold Blood* is part fiction, part fact, while *My Struggle* is mostly or exclusively fact, despite being called a novel, and that's all there is to it. Why should theorists lose their sleep over such cases ? The problem is that almost all theories of fiction are binary rather than gradual and therefore do not allow degrees.

The purpose of formal theories is to define fiction, that is, to create a border. Not only should they provide criteria for identifying a given work as fictional or factual, they should also give reasons for our interest in fiction. Assuming that, typically, fictions deal with entities that do not exist, and generally do not provide practical information useful in our daily life, why are fictions such an important part of our mental and cultural life? Conversely, even though fictions deal with the imaginary and non-existent, how can one explain the phenomenon of learning from fiction—a phenomenon strongly suggested by the fact that young children, who must learn about the world, are exposed to fictions long before they are exposed to factual narratives. On the adult level, Pascal Engel has argued that we can learn procedural skills from reading fiction: for instance how to survive on a desert island from *Robinson Crusoe*, though it is unlikely that we will ever be able to apply this knowledge. But we could learn about the Heimlich manoeuver from a novel and save somebody in real life. Derek Matravers thinks that we can learn about whaling techniques from Moby Dick, while Françoise Lavocat observes that it is thanks to Balzac, Flaubert or Zola that we can imagine life in the 19th century. And as far as precise facts go, Gregory Currie thinks that readers can learn from *War and Peace* that the Russian aristocracy spoke French. If formal theories do not justify the creation of beliefs out of fictions, they will be at odds with the intuitive judgments of readers. In a perfect world, formal theories should support rather than contradict folk theories. In what follows I discuss how two formal theories behave with respect to intuitive judgments.

The world approach to fiction

The notion of possible world, as used in modal logic, and its cousin the notion of storyworld, used in narratology, are good example of what is called theoretical fictions. About such entities, Adam Toon writes: "We find that we cannot avoid talking about [them]. And yet we also find it difficult to commit ourselves to their existence" (119). But even if storyworlds do not exist objectively, they are not deprived of properties. A storyworld is an environment with both a

spatial and a temporal extension in which the singular existents of a narrative are located and in which the events that affect these existents take place, changing the global state of the storyworld. Every fiction deploys its own fictional world, unless it is an extension of another fictional world such as a prequel or sequel. For instance, from an ontological perspective, the various novels of Jane Austen take place in different worlds, though they share the same social and historical setting, but all the novels of *La Comédie Humaine* by Balzac take place in the same world. Moreover, the notion of fictional world is recursive, so that there can be fictional worlds within fictional worlds, as for instance the worlds of the many tales told by Scheherazade in the *Arabian nights*. None of these tales shares the same existents as the story of Scheherazade and the Sultan, and they constitute therefore distinct ontological levels: it would take a metalepsis for Ali Baba to interact with Scheherazade. Insofar as readers and critics spontaneously talk about the world of a given fiction, the notion of world has the advantage of being both a useful tool of formal theory, and an intuitive concept of folk theories.

In a world-based theory, either a narrative describes the real world, or it creates its own world. It is the author's openly stated intent, as expressed by a generic indicator, that distinguishes fiction from nonfiction: if fiction, the storyworld is an alternate world and is meant to be imagined; if nonfiction, the storyworld is the real world and is meant to be both believed and imagined. (Unlike many authors, I do not think that believing and imagining are incompatible: we can either believe and imagine, or imagine without believing, but we cannot believe without forming a mental representation of the narrated. This mental representation is what I call imagining.)

Though the idea of fictional or storyworld is not necessarily indebted to the philosophical notion of possible world, I would like to base my discussion of the world approach on this formula by David Lewis, one of the main figures of possible worlds theory: "Here at our world we have a fiction *f*, told in an act *a* of storytelling; at some other world we have an act *a'* of telling the truth about known matters of fact; the stories told in *a* and *a'* match word for word, and the words have the same meaning" (40). This formula supports a central tenet of narratology: the contrast between the act of communication that takes place in the real world between the author and the reader (spectator, player, etc.) and the act of communication that takes place in the storyworld between a narrator and a narratee. A feature I like about Lewis' formula is that by contrasting "our world," that is, the real world, with "some other world," which is the storyworld, the formula allows a switching of perspective by the reader that I have called recentering (Ryan 1991). Readers or spectators move back and forth from the perspective of the storyworld to the perspective of the real world. When they adopt the storyworld perspective, they regard characters as real people, they feel emotions for them, they are caught in the suspense of the action, or they experience a sense of place thanks to the descriptions, all experiences that contribute to immersion. When they adopt the real world perspective, they regard the storyworld, the characters and the action as creation of the author, and they evaluate the author's world-building activity from an aesthetic point of view.

To return to the above examples, the world approach has no problem with *My Struggle*, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, *Josephine* and autofiction: they are all fictions, but they build their storyworld partly out of invention, partly or fully out of facts. The classification of *Citizens* as nonfiction is no problem either: insofar as the information is documented, the author has not departed from fact, despite borrowing a fictional technique. If there is a border transgression, it is stylistic but not semantic. *Dutch* on the other hand is much more transgressive because the author's creation of a character who does not exist is incompatible with its obvious generic claim

of real-world accuracy. As for *In Cold Blood,* it resorts to invention only to enhance the knowable, to make it more appealing to the imagination. If *In Cold Blood* transgresses any rule of history, it is by presenting the possible as fact—a far lesser transgression than presenting the non-existing as existing, as does the author of *Dutch*. With *In Cold Blood*, a binary world-based theory has two choices: either the storyworld is the real world, or it is a fictional world located very close to the real world but still ontologically different. Both solutions encounter difficulties: the storyworld cannot be the real world, since readers must be selective in their beliefs and disbelieve much of the text. But if the storyworld is a fictional world located close to the real world, this does not explain why most readers are attracted to this kind of text because it tells about a true crime, and because it combines the imaginative appeal of fiction with the epistemic appeal of learning about the real world. I believe that the important thing in this case is not to decide whether the storyworld is the real world or an alternate world, and whether the text is fact or fiction, but to understand the contract between author and reader under which the text operates. This contract says something like this: "I, the author, respect the facts that are verifiable. But I have complemented them with unverifiable speculation." In other words, this contract stresses the hybridity of the text. These texts are not deceptive because readers have an intuitive notion of what is verifiable and what is not; therefore, readers know fairly well what they should believe as true, and what they should imagine as merely possible, and they are not seriously at risk of receiving false information.[1] If we assume that texts like *In Cold Blood* represent a special kind of contract, the theory of fiction will be neither binary nor gradual, but ternary/non-gradual.

The rhetorical approach to fiction

Almost all, if not all of the theories of fictionality that have been proposed since the seventies have gravitated around the concepts of pretense, make-believe, and imagining versus believing, all of which imply non-truth. The rhetorical approach breaks with that tradition by offering a totally different paradigm. It was first sketched in Walsh 2007, then further developed by Walsh with the collaboration of Henrik Skov Nielsen and James Phelan in a *Narrative* article from 2015, and it is nowadays so widely publicized, especially in the International Society for the Study of Narrative, that it seems to have become the new orthodoxy among narratologists (though not among philosophers).

The basic idea of the rhetorical theory is that fiction, or rather, fictionality, is a mode of communication. Moreover, communication is the transmission of a message that concerns the real world: as Nielsen et al write, "Fictive discourse is not ultimately a means of constructing scenarios that are cut off from the actual world, but rather a means of negotiating an engagement with that world" (2015: 63). Or, as Gammelgaard et al. write: "Both fictionality and nonfictionality are ways of communicating in the real world and about the real world" (2023:5). But they do it in different ways, that is, through different rhetorical resources. In a later article, Walsh explicitly reject the idea of a fictional storyworld because he thinks it is fundamentally opposed to communication: "It is not just that fictional-worlds approaches have nothing to say about communicative purposes; it is that they actually foreclose the possibility that the distinctiveness of fiction might have something to do with its communicative use" (2019: 401). Why does the notion of storyworld have nothing to say about communication ? Because there is only one world, the actual world, and all communication should refer to it. What makes fictionality into a rhetorical resource is that authors have two ways to convey messages about the

real world: either directly, by providing factual information, or indirectly, by making up stories and other scenarios. If we interpret this idea literally, Tolstoy chose to write a whole novel with invented characters to persuade readers that "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Another tenet of the rhetorical theory is that fictionality far exceeds generic fiction, that is, genres conventionally recognized as fictional such as the novel and short stories, or media such as (fictional) film and theater. For Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh fiction is full of nonfiction and nonfiction frequently includes fiction. They distinguish therefore between a global fictionality, which affects entire genres according to cultural conventions, and a local fictionality, which is the mainstay of globally fictional texts, but also surfaces occasionally in globally non-fictional texts. The modes of expression they regard as instances of local fictionality include not only made up stories, but also "spoofs, counterfactuals, speculations, what-if projections, if-only regrets, thought experiments and hypotheses of all kinds" (2015, 62). Among their examples of fictionality in a nonfictional context, the authors mention Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, which describes a possible future rather than a known past or present; Barack Obama's suggestion that Mitt Romney, his opponent in the 2012 presidential election, suffers from Romneysia to satirize his apparent loss of memory concerning his policies when he was governor of Massachusetts, and the exclamation "Je suis Charlie" uttered by a French journalist to express his empathy after the terrorist attack that killed collaborators of Charlie Hebdo. James Phelan (2023) even regards as fictional a passage in a non-fictional war narratives in which a soldier contemplates how closely he escaped death, because this represents the could-have-been rather than the factual. In other words, everything that is not a straightforward and truth-claiming assertion of facts counts as local fictionality. The world approach, by contrast, recognizes only global fictionality, but it allows the embedding of fictional texts within a nonfictional context, such as jokes in conversation, parables in sermons, or made-up examples in philosophy, provided these texts are properly framed and distinguished from their context. (For instance by saying: "I know a good one.") On the other hand, it does not regard modes of expression such as counterfactuals, speculations, what-if projections, if-only regrets, thought experiments and hypotheses as fictional.

How does the rhetorical theory deal with the examples I have presented at the beginning of this presentation ? I assume that with *Josephine*, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, and even *My Struggle* it would say they are fiction on the global level because they are labelled novels by either the author or some other authority, and the genre novel is culturally defined as fiction, but on the local level they contain lots of nonfiction. With *Dutch* and *Citizens* it would say: they are nonfiction on the global level, but they have local elements of fictionality. None of them would be transgressive, not even *Dutch*, because local blends of fictionality/nonfictionality are a very common, one could even say inevitable practice. Similarly, *In Cold Blood* and autofictions would be nonfiction on the global level, and hybrids on the local level, with a majority of nonfiction.

The opposition between global and local fictionality handles the hybrid cases pretty well. But if we take a closer look, this opposition is problematic. One question raised by the distinction between global and local fictionality is whether they are really the same thing, but applying to different levels, or whether they are different phenomena. The original version of the theory considers "signaled invention" to be the distinctive feature of fictionality, and the qualifier signaled serves to distinguish fiction from lies. But Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh do not tell us whether this signaled invention describes the global level, the local level or both. Since most

texts are blends of fact and fiction, and since authors overwhelmingly rely on their life experience, even when they write fantasy or science-fiction, a text is never totally invented. But unlike the invention of the global level, the invention of the local level is not signaled: in order to do so, authors would have to mark the true and the false in different ways, for instance in different colors. I am not aware of this being ever tempted. Even if we put aside the issue of signaling, if local and global fictionality are both defined as invention, the label of the global level reflects the proportion of invention of the local level; but what proportion of invention does it take to make a text fictional ? Alternatively, global and local fictionality are different phenomena. On the local level fictionality is invention, which means, a matter of non-truth, but on the global level fictionality is a matter of generic convention, an institutional matter. But what is culture really saying when it labels the novel a genre of fiction ? In other words, calling global fiction a generic convention is not an explanation, because we need to understand what it means to call a genre fiction, and what contract it involves between the author and the reader. A definition with explanatory power could be: "a text is classified as fiction when it is offered for make-believe and not belief." But the rhetorical theory makes no attempt at telling us what it means to be a generic fiction.

An alternative to defining fictionality as signaled invention has been proposed by Richard Walsh. This alternative regards fiction as an "indirect" way to communicate. "The distinguished quality of fictionality is not some mediated kind of falsehood, but independence from directly informative kind of relevance" (2019, 399). To go back to the previous examples: Obama does not inform the public that Romney suffers from a disease called Romneysia, Martin Luther King does not report about a dream he really had, and the French journalist is not saying that, through some kind of magical metamorphosis, he has become one of the victims of the attack on Charlie Hebdo. And of course Tolstoy is not informing us about the tragic fate of a woman named Anna Karenina. So again we must ask: does this definition concern the global level, the local level, or both ? Let's assume that it operates on both levels. Then tropes such as irony, metaphor and metonymy are instances of fictionality, since they convey meaning indirectly, and should not be taken literally. This is the opinion of James Phelan; he regards metaphor as an example of local fictionality, but only when it is original: frozen metaphors do not count (248).

Walsh actually resists the association of fiction with metaphor and irony, but his reason is murky. "Fictionality is no more to be conflated with irony than with metaphor, of course: quite apart from irony's specific evaluative orientation, it is not necessarily an utterance-level phenomenon (2019, 418)." Here Walsh is saying that because irony is not necessarily an utterance-level phenomenon, it differs from fiction; this implies that only utterance-levels phenomena qualify as fiction. In other words, Walsh's attempt to exclude irony (as well as metaphor) from fictionality denies the possibility of local fictionality. And indeed, if we go back to the list of modes of expression that Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh 2015 present as examples of local fictionality, namely, counterfactuals, speculations, what-if projections, if-only regrets, thought experiments and hypotheses of all kinds (I leave out spoofs, which seem to me to represent global fictionality), none of them represents the same semantic phenomenon as telling a story as fiction, none of them represents invention, and none of them is an indirect form of expression. [2]And of course none of them involves make-believe. Conclusion: they are not fiction by any definition.

I keep for the end the biggest conflict between rhetorical and world-based theories: the idea that all fiction is an indirect way to convey a message about the actual world. It is true that many fictions have a didactic orientation. Fables carry an explicit moral to guide behavior in the

real world, and many novels illustrate a well-defined social or ideological thesis. Moreover, a powerful incentive for reading fiction is to experience "what it is like" to be involved in situations that could occur in the real world, such as wars, social injustice, discrimination, and violence. People often select novels to learn about foreign countries and past historical periods, and science-fiction warns us about how technology will shape the future of our world. Aristotle's claim that the task of the poet—in opposition to the task of the historian—is to show what could be according to necessity and probability suggests a real-world orientation, especially if we interpret probability as that which could happen in the real world. If the goal of fiction is to convey messages about the real world, then the purpose of reading or watching it is to extract this message through an act of interpretation. The insistence of the advocates of the rhetorical theory on relevance in interpretation is symptomatic of this priority: they reject immersion as a way to experience fiction, and they deny validity to any kind of reality principle, because reality principles allow users to attribute properties to fictional objects that do not lead to the formation of relevant interpretations—for instance, assuming that Emma Bovary has two eyes because she is a human being. Moreover, the idea that the relevance of fiction resides in a message for the real world can lead to dangerous conclusions, as the tendency of some of the readers of Dan Brown's novels to believe in conspiracy theories demonstrates. We should read *The Da Vinci Code* for its thrilling action, and not as the denunciation of a cover-up by the Catholic church. How can the rhetorical theory prevent such interpretations ?

World-based theories reply to this real-world orientation by saying that it denies the pleasure taken in the contemplation of fictional worlds. Imagining fictional worlds is an autotelic activity, and interpretation, if by this one means the extraction of general truths relevant to the real world, is only an optional operation, typical of classroom discussions and scholarly articles, compared to more fundamental sources of pleasure : the formation of mental imagery, the mental simulation of narrative scenes and events; and the rationalization of the plot by inferring the motivations of the agents and assessing the results of their actions. As Catharine Abell observes (15), understanding and interpretation are different activities; if so, we can understand (and enjoy) a fictional narrative without figuring out what the author is trying to say. There are many genres that people consume avidly without asking for real-world relevance: genres such as mystery stories, thrillers, romance, and especially fantasy. The fan culture inspired by franchises such as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *Lord of the Rings*, and the appetite of the public for prequels, sequels and midquels of popular narratives that allow consumers to revisit a favorite world is a testament to the power of what J.R.R. Tolkien called "subcreation," a secondary world creation that emulates the creative work of God. It is worth noting that from the antiquity to the Baroque era fantastic world creation was much more important for fiction than reality-imitation, and it is only from the 18th century that fictional worlds started resembling the real world and that characters became ordinary people rather than kings, princesses, noble knights, wizards, shepherds and shepherdesses. Literary purists look down upon "genre fiction" such as fantasy, romance and mystery as escapist, but a theory of fiction should explain the appeal of any kind of fiction, rather than limiting itself to the real-world relevance that we expect from literary masterpieces.

Comparing the world and the rhetorical theories

Here is how the two theories deal with the gradual vs. binary dilemma. For the rhetorical theory, if one accepts its idea of fictionality as aiming at truth through literal falsity, there is a

continuum from strictly informational texts to texts dominated by either invention or indirection. But the location of the binary border of the global level is problematic: what proportion of local fictionality does a text require to be considered a generic fiction ? The rhetorical theory is silent on this issue. On the other hand, for the world theory, if there is a gradual domain, this domain lies on the factual side: some factual genres are strictly limited to verifiable truths, such as courtroom testimony or scientific history, and some genres are much more tolerant of complementing the knowable with the speculative or unverifiable, such as autobiography, conversational storytelling, the historiography of older cultures when the distinction fact/fiction was not as solidified as it is today, or the genre illustrated by *In Cold Blood*: creative nonfiction. Dialogues and reports of other people's thoughts are common fare in oral narratives of personal experience, which are told to be believed in their broad lines, and to the extent that we can infer people thoughts by using our theory of mind, and are able to partly remember dialogue, these features do not necessarily constitute fictional invention. [3]It is only when they are developed for their own sake, and beyond the limits of practical probability, that dialogue and thought report become signposts of fictionality. But while there are degrees of factuality for a world approach, there are no degrees on the other side of the fictional border: a realistic novel is no less fictional than a fantastic one since both refer to a world that is non-actual. In all fictional texts, the reader must rely on the totality of the information provided by the text to imagine the storyworld, whether or not this information happens to be true of false in the actual world. But between the zone of fiction and the zone of nonfiction there is an indeterminate zone, illustrated by *In Cold Blood*, for which classification as either fiction or not loses its importance, or that could be regarded as a discrete third type, defined, as I suggest above, by its own type of contract between author and reader.

The world approach tells us that fiction creates autonomous worlds, the rhetorical approach that it creates imaginary content to say something about our world. Therefore the world theory is better than the rhetorical theory at explaining the pleasure of fiction and the behavior of fans of popular culture who are in love with a certain fictional world, and the rhetorical theory is better at explaining how we can learn from statements that are technically false. The world-approach makes users attentive to the particular, to the details that grab the imagination while the rhetorical approach focuses on the general statements that can be derived from a fiction. The ideal, achieved by the best of works, is of course a combination of these two kinds of relevance, and a complete theory should recognize both dimensions. But it should also remain able to account for narratives that fulfill one but not the other. There are fictions whose sole interest lies in what they say about the real world, such as parables, thought experiments and didactic narratives such as *romans à thèse*, which are usually despised by critics, and there are fictions that create enjoyable imaginary worlds but say nothing of interest about reality, like many texts of genre fiction. The relation between fictional worlds as autonomous entities and their ability to say something about the real worlds is an issue of major theoretical relevance, not only for the theory of fiction, but also for cognitive approaches to narrative, and I believe it has not received the attention that it deserves.

My preference for a world-based theory over a rhetorical one lies in the fact that it is easy for the world-based theory to explain the relevance of a fiction for the real world: there are certain individual facts in the real world, there are different individual facts in the fictional world, and there is an abstract principle that explains both: for instance, that flatterers live at the expense of those who listen to them (La Fontaine, "Le Corbeau et le renard"). On the other hand,

if a theory denies the world-creating power of fiction and the intrinsic value of its worlds, I don't see how it can explain our fascination for fiction.

Even though I have a clear favorite, I hope to have shown through this comparison of the two approaches that there is no perfect theory that answers all questions and creates unanimity. This lack of a perfect theory may be a blessing in disguise, for it will enable us to debate fictionality for years to come, rather than closing the case.

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[1] The invented scene at the end of *In Cold Blood* constitutes a breach of this contract: the reader has no reason to believe it is invented.

[2] Indeed, in the 2019 article (416), Walsh rejects the idea that these forms of expression represent fictionality, thereby diverging from Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh 2015.

[3] This claim counters the position expressed by Mari Hatavera and Jarmila Mildorf (2017), who regard any representation of the mental state of a person other than the narrator in factual discourse as an intrusion of fictionality, this is to say, as fictional contamination .

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